ABOUT MARGARET AND HENRY MARSH

Bishop Henry and Margaret Marsh, 1967, Whitehorse, Yukon.

This remarkable Collection was assembled by Margaret and Henry Marsh over the course of forty years association with the people of the Arctic.

They both became interested in the Arctic at an early age. They were enthralled by the first-hand accounts of relatives and family friends who had served as teachers, and Anglican missionaries, among the native peoples. When they married, the Marshes served in the parish of St. Timothy's in North Toronto for thirty years and focused the concern of their parish on the needs of our northern peoples. Bishop Marsh served on the executive of the Canadian Missionary Society, and Mrs. Marsh was subsequently elected President of the Diocese of the Arctic Women's Auxiliary in 1948.

In this role, Mrs. Marsh travelled frequently to remote settlements in the Arctic, and encountered Inuit sculpture for the first time, in the form of small ivory carvings. Attracted to these carvings of birds, animals and human figures, Mrs. Marsh arranged for them to be sold at church auxiliary sales, and began her own Collection.

The Collection grew with the acquisition of a set of all the animals and birds of Baffin Island, carved from narwhal ivory by Inuit patients at the hospital in Pangnirtung. When she retired as President of the Arctic Women's Auxiliary in 1952, Mrs. Marsh was given a set of figurines which completed this series.

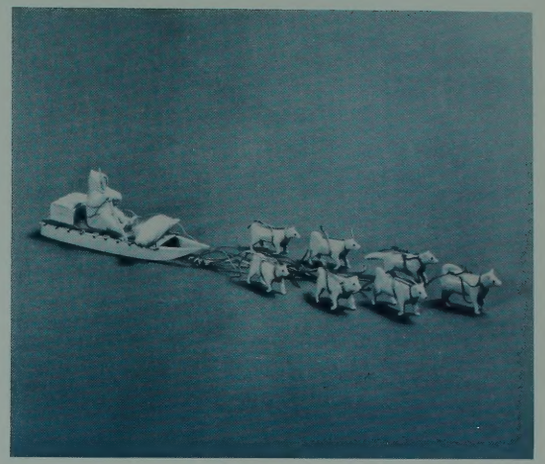
Over the years, additional pieces were carefully chosen to enlarge the scope of the Collection. The dolls with ivory faces and sealskin clothes, made in Coppermine about 1900, were family heirlooms, given to Mrs. Marsh by her aunt, Jennie Soanes. When Henry Marsh was Bishop of the Yukon, from 1962 to 1970, the Marshes often travelled to Inuit settlements in Alaska, the Northwest Territories and Arctic Quebec, where they acquired new pieces for the Collection.

The Marshes exercised their own taste, in terms of style, subject matter, size and media, thus giving the Collection its unique character.

The objects that the Marshes donated to the Gallery are in two categories: artifacts, such as tools, dolls and games, which were made by the Inuit for their own use; and works of art created to be sold outside the Arctic.

The decision to give the Collection to the Art Gallery of Northumberland came about at the suggestion of the Marshes' daughter, Mary. The Marshes agreed that the Collection was an important historic and artistic resource, which should be shared with the public — they donated it to the Art Gallery in 1976. As a result of their generosity, the Collection is now enjoyed by thousands of people every year.

The Art Gallery of Northumberland is a community based public gallery supported by the Towns of Cobourg and Port Hope and Northumberland County. The Gallery receives grants from the National Museums of Canada, The Canada Council, The Ontario Arts Council, The Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Culture and Wintario.



"Returning From The Hunt" carved ivory figures, 18" long.

Basket With Carved Ivory Polar Bear Lid - Basket woven from the seiving whiskers of a Baluga whale - 3¼".

Photography of Artifacts by Ted Hunt.

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THE MARGARET AND HENRY MARSH COLLECTION OF INUIT ART & ARCTIC ARTIFACTS

ART GALLERY OF NORTHUMBERLAND
55 King Street West, Cobourg, Ontario Canada K9A 2M2
Telephone (416) 372-0333

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The Marsh Collection can be enjoyed on several levels. First, we can look at the Collection to see how the Inuit made skillful use of natural materials for survival; secondly, we can study the works of art to learn about important aspects of Inuit culture such as hunting, human relationships and games; and lastly, we can enjoy the sculptures for their sheer beauty and for the special way of seeing that they express.

In order to survive in the Arctic, the Inuit had to make all their implements and clothing from resources at hand, such as ivory and animal skins. Their skill in using these materials was carried over into the making of works of art. A hunter learned to carve strong, efficient harpoon heads from ivory, and came to know and appreciate the special qualities of this material. Small carvings, such as the **White Whale** from Povungnirtuk, show how the carver's knowledge of ivory is used in an expressive way. The Inuit carver works in harmony with the naturally smooth texture of the ivory, conceiving the whale as a smooth, rounded shape.

The ability to sew warm, well-made garments from animal skins was essential for survival in the Arctic; indeed, the Greenland Eskimos have a saying, "A man is the hunter his wife makes him". Traditional Inuit parkas were ingeniously designed with two layers, for maximum insulation, and were sewn with minute stitches. Inuit women sewed these garments using caribou sinew and ivory needles, such as the example shown in the Collection.

These same sewing skills are evident in many pieces in the Collection, notably the **pair of dolls,** made in Coppermine about 1900, which have carved walrus ivory heads, jointed bodies, and traditional sealskin clothing. These beautiful dolls, made for a beloved child, show great attention to detail in the use of contrasting shades of fur in the parkas. They provide an interesting contrast with the later **pair of dolls,** from the mouth of the Great Whale River on Hudson Bay, which have heads of carved driftwood and bodies stuffed with grass. In these later dolls we see the influence of white fashions. Calico has replaced fur on the woman's parka, and she wears a skirt instead of the traditional baggy trousers.

In choosing to portray certain subjects, the Inuit sculptors tell us about the things that are important to them. As Paulosie Kasadluak, an Inuit sculptor, puts it,

> We carve the animals because they are important to us as food. We carve Inuit figures because in that way we can show ourselves to the world as we were in the past and as we now are.

The pieces in the Collection show the importance of the hunt, of close human relationships, and of traditional games. All the stages of the hunt are portrayed in the Collection. First, we see the animals and birds in their wild state, portrayed in small ivory carvings. Then, in a soapstone carving from the Belcher Islands, we see a hunter stalking a seal. The joy of the successfully completed hunt is portrayed in a set of ivory carvings from Pangnirtung, which show a hunter returning home with a dead seal on his sled.

Other artifacts show how the seal will provide food, clothing, light and heat for the family. The hunter's wife will scrape the meat and blubber from the sealskin with an **ulu,** a carved tool designed for that purpose. An example, from Kotzebue, Alaska, is on display. The seal blubber will be burned in a soapstone lamp, to provide heat and light in the igloo. A **blubber lamp** of this type is reproduced in a miniature soapstone carving from Pond Inlet.

The sculptures and artifacts portray the importance of close family and community relationships. The mutual interdependence of men and women is seen in the way in which male and female figures are created in pairs. The tender relationship between mother and child is portrayed in a small ivory sculpture. The woman carries her baby in a special inside pouch, or **amaut,** in the back of her parka. Community togetherness on a larger scale is seen in the genial sealskin group, the **Villagers of Tuktoyaktuk.**

A third important theme in the Collection is the role of games in the upbringing of children. Little girls cared for their dolls as training for motherhood. Games of skill were played by both girls and boys to develop manual dexterity and perseverance, qualities which are essential in the hunt. Two such games are the **Ayagak,** or pin and ring game, and the sealskin **yo-yo.** Both these games express a fundamental value of Inuit society, that skill, cleverness and agility are more important than mere brute force.

The beauty of Inuit sculptures reflects a particular way of seeing the world. Traditional activities of the Inuit, and the animals of the Arctic are depicted in a straightforward, naturalistic style: natural appearances are often simplified, but they are rarely distorted. The Collection thus represents the realistic tradition in Inuit art.

It also reveals a preference for pieces on a small, intimate scale. The most outstanding quality of the sculptures in the Collection is the ability of the artists to capture the characteristic features of their subjects with a minimum of detail. This is especially true of the small ivory animals. For example, in the narwhal ivory **Polar Bear**, from Pangnirtung, the sculptor conveys a sense of the bear's bulk and strength. As the polar bear walks into the wind, its paws reach forward to grip the snow and propel its great mass forward. The Inuit sculptor thus conveys a strong sense of life. This concept is central to all Inuit sculpture, for the Inuit word for carving, **sananguaq**, literally means "giving life".

Today, the traditional way of life which is portrayed in the Marsh Collection is rapidly changing. For the Inuit, art has become an important way of documenting their traditions, and preserving what is best in them for future generations. Art is also a way for the Inuit to communicate their experiences and values to people outside their own culture. By bringing together this wonderful Collection, and by donating it to a public art gallery, Bishop and Mrs. Marsh have helped us to learn more about the Inuit, and have enriched the lives of many people.

Allison MacDuffee